Washington Wildlife & Recreation Program

Evaluation Criteria

Natural Areas Category
(State Agencies)

"Natural Areas means areas that have, to a significant degree, retained their natural character and are important in preserving rare or vanishing flora, fauna, geological, natural historical, or similar features of scientific or educational value." RCW ***79A.15.010***

WWRP - Natural Areas Evaluation Summary		
Criteria	**Evaluation Elements**	**Possible Points**
Project Introduction	• Locate the project on statewide, vicinity, and site maps • Brief summary of the project (goals and objective(s) statement)	Not scored
Ecological and Biological Characteristics	• The bigger picture • Uniqueness/significance of the site • Species and/or communities • Quality of Habitat / Natural Features	20
Species and Communities with Special Status	• Threat to species/communities • Importance of acquisitions • Ecological roles • Taxonomic distinctness	10
Manageability and Viability	• Immediacy of threat to the site • Long-term viability • Enhancement of existing protected land	15
Public Benefit	• Project support • Educational and/or scientific value	5
	Total Points Possible	**50**

WWRP Scoring Criteria

Natural Areas Category

1. ECOLOGICAL /BIOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTCS Why is the site worthy of long-term conservation?

"Paint a picture" of your project for the evaluators - the what, where, and why. This is the "heart" of your presentation and evaluators will draw conclusions based on the information presented about the *quality and function of the plant community, habitat* or other unique geological or natural historical features and the *demonstrated need to protect* it.

THE BIGGER PICTURE. How is this project supported by a current plan (i.e., Natural Heritage Plan, local, watershed, statewide, or species/community management or recovery plans)? What is the status of the plan? What process was used to identify this project as a priority? What specific role does this project play in a broader watershed or landscape picture? Is it part of a phased project? Is it a stand-alone site/habitat?

UNIQUENESS/SIGNIFICANCE. Explain how the site is unique or significant on a global, regional, state, ecosystem, and/or watershed level. How unique is the site in relation to habitat quality, connectivity, diversity, rarity? How is the site important to the target species and/or communities? [1] Are the target species and/or communities geographically isolated to this particular site? How does this site compare to others of the same type?

SPECIES AND/OR COMMUNITIES. What significant species and/or communities currently exist on, or use the site? Which, if any, are the target species and/or communities? *("Target species or communities" may or may not be special status species.)* Describe the community type(s) and explain the relative condition of the population of target species and/or communities. Which species and/or communities have the potential and likelihood to use the site in the future and will reintroduction occur naturally or otherwise?

QUALITY OF HABITAT/NATURAL FEATURES. Describe the ecological and biological quality of the site and how it supports the species or communities present. Describe how this site represents a native ecosystem, or, it's rarity in relation to other types. Describe how this has site retained, to a significant degree, its natural character. Are the size, quality, and other site characteristics adequate to support the target species or communities within the context of the Project Area?

[1] A *target species or community* is your project's primary objective for protection and stands to gain the greatest benefit from the acquisition. For example, a project's primary objective may be to acquire and protect high quality shrub-steppe. This is the "target community," but that community also provides important habitat for shrub-steppe-dependent species.

2. Species and/or Communities with Special Status. What is the significance of each species or community listed on your species and communities status table (page 6)?

This question's intent is to determine the significance of the species or communities with special status and how they may benefit from your project. Some special status species or communities may benefit on a more passive basis, while others may benefit directly. *In the interest of time, you may want to address only the species or communities that benefit the most from this project.*

IMMEDIACY OF THREAT TO THE SPECIES/COMMUNITIES. Describe the immediacy of threat to the species/community (e.g., imminent danger of extinction of extirpation; threatened within the foreseeable future, or concern because of current trends; population stable, but catastrophic event could threaten; no foreseeable threat).

IMPORTANCE OF ACQUISITION TO SPECIES /COMMUNITY PROTECTION. Describe how this acquisition contributes to the conservation of these species or communities with special status. Describe the distribution or range and, if known, the abundance of the species or community. Identify any recovery plans, conservation strategies or similar plans that include reference to this site.

ECOLOGICAL ROLES. How will these communities or species benefit from this project? Describe how this project will provide ecological support for the communities or species with special status.

TAXONOMIC DISTINCTNESS. How evolutionarily distinct is the species in question? That is, is it recognized as the only species in its genus? Is it one of ten species in the genus? Is it only recognized at the subspecific level, i.e. as a variety or subspecies? Example: Water howellia *(Howellia aquatilis)* is the only recognized species in the genus Howellia, whereas Bauxbaum's sedge *(Carex buxbaumii)* is a member of a very large genus, consisting of more than one thousand recognized species. Presumably, the genetic material of water howellia is more distinctive from all other living species than is Buxbaum's sedge. Some scientists believe that more evolutionarily distinct organisms should have a higher priority for protection. Based on this assumption, if all else is equal, it would be more important to conserve water howellia than Buxbaum's sedge.

3. MANAGEABILITY AND VIABILITY. What is the likelihood of the site being viable (functioning) over the long term and why is it important to secure it now?

This question's intent is to determine whether the site can be managed, and how it will be managed, to protect the target species, communities, or natural features.

IMMEDIACY OF THREAT TO THE SITE. What, and how imminent, are the threats to the site (i.e., inherent, ecological, human, conversion, abatable and/or non-abatable threats). Are these new threats or ongoing threats? How do or will these threats affect the function of the site? How will protection of the site affect these threats? What steps have already been taken to secure the land or reduce the threats?

LONG-TERM VIABILITY. What regulatory protections are already afforded the site (i.e., County Comprehensive Plan, Critical Areas Ordinances, zoning, development regulations, Shoreline Management rules, Forest Practice rules including Landowner Landscape Plans, Habitat Conservation Plans etc.)? Demonstrate how the site will be managed over time to maintain the desired characteristics. Who will maintain it and what human and financial resources are available to do it? What management needs are there? What restorative efforts, if any, are needed or planned? What is happening across the landscape or watershed that may affect the viability of the site? Describe any long-term site monitoring plans and identify who will implement monitoring?

ENHANCEMENT OF EXISTING PROTECTED LAND. Are there other lands (public and private) near or adjoining this site that have complimentary or compatible land uses for the target species and/or communities? Are they managed in a manner consistent with the needs of the target species and/or communities? Is this site part of a larger ownership? If so, describe the connectivity and management of the other land.

4. Public Benefit. To what degree do communities, governments, landowners, constituent groups, or academia benefit from or support the project?

This question's intent is to find out what the *unique* public benefits are of your project. Public benefit should not be equated with "public access." The question is not meant to discount projects for *not* having overwhelming support or educational opportunities. It may be that your project has one or the other qualities and not both. Your answer will be scored on those unique qualities and how they are appropriate for, or of benefit to, your project.

PROJECT SUPPORT.

a. Describe the support/partnerships you have from the community, interest groups, volunteers, public agencies, etc. How have you involved these groups in project development? Explain any known opposition to the project.

b. Describe and document other monetary means that have been secured to help cover the costs for the project, i.e., grants, donations, in-kind contributions, etc.

EDUCATIONAL AND/OR SCIENTIFIC VALUE. Describe the scientific and educational values of the site. Is there an identified research or educational need documented in a management plan, thesis, or scientific journal related to the habitat, species, or communities at the site? How likely is it that these opportunities will come to fruition? How accessible is the site for these activities?

Instructions: Species and Communities with Special Status Table

Species and Communities With Special Status Table. Complete and submit the table on page 7. This is a required part of the application. Staff will verify the information and evaluators will be given a copy of the table along with the other project materials. This table relates directly to Evaluation Question #2, Species and Communities with Special Status, with emphasis on the significance of the species. As part of the presentation, applicants must describe the significance information to evaluators for scoring.

Species, Community or Habitat Type. List each species, community, or habitat type with special status present in your project area or work site.

Occurrence. For special status animal species, indicate whether the occurrence of the species at the site is *breeding, feeding, migration, resting, perching, roosting, wintering, rearing, spawning, year-round resident, individual occurrence, or unknown.* For special status plant species, communities or habitat types, enter *"N/A"* in the occurrence column.

Status and Source. Indicate the status of the species and the source from which you obtained the information. Federal and state status and source information follows:

Federally Listed Species:
- Resident fish and wildlife–Endangered Species Office, Lacey (360) 753-9440
- Pacific salmon species–National Marine Fisheries Service; www.noaa.gov/

State Listed Species and Candidate Species:
- Endangered Species Section, WDFW, (360) 902-2515; www.wa.gov/wdfw/wildlife.htm

Priority Habitats and Species:
- Priority Habitat and Species Program, WDFW, (360) 902-2543; www.wa.gov/wdfw/habitat.htm

State Listed Plant Species and Communities:
- Natural Heritage Program, DNR (360) 902-1667; www.wa.gov/dnr/

IAC will provide data request forms for both state databases. If your information came from a source other than these (such as a consultant or local biologist), please indicate on your form.

Federal Status		***State Status***	
FE	Endangered	SE	State endangered
FT	Threatened	ST	State threatened
FP	Proposed for threatened or endangered	SS	State sensitive
FC	Candidate for listing status review	SC	Candidate for listing status review
FSC	Species of concern	PS	Priority Species, non-listed but vulnerable
		PH	Priority Habitat
		P1, P2, P3	Priority 1, Priority 2, and Priority 3 (plants)

Example Table:

Species, Community or Habitat Type	***Occurrence***	***Status***	***Source***
Douglas Fir/ Western Hemlock/ Swordfern Community	N/A	P 2	DNR – WNHP
Brown Pelican	foraging, resting	FE, SE	WDFW – PHS
Thompson's Clover	N/A	P 2	DNR – WNHP
Chinook Salmon	rearing	FE	NMFS; SSHIAP *
Western Pond Turtle	year-round resid't	FSC, SE	USFWS; Consultant
Riparian Area	N/A	PH	WDFW – PHS

* SSHIAP Salmon and Steelhead Habitat Inventory and Assessment Program (NW Indian Fisheries Commission /WDFW)

Species and Communities With Special Status Table

Project Name:_____

Applicant Name:_____

Date: _____

Check one: ☐ **Critical Habitat** ☐ **Natural Areas** ☐ **Urban Wildlife Habitat**

Species, Community or Habitat Type	Occurrence	Status	Source